



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

**Committee for Employment and Learning
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To: Shane McAteer, Clerk to the Committee for Finance and Personnel

From: Cathie White, Clerk to the Committee for Employment and Learning

Date: 27 February 2014

Subject: Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland

Shane,

At its meeting on 26 February 2014 the Committee for Employment and Learning considered a response from the Department for Employment and Learning regarding the Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland and agreed to forward it to the Committee for Finance and Personnel for information.

I should be grateful if you would bring this to the attention of your Committee.

Regards,

Committee Clerk

Enc.



Department for
**Employment
and Learning**
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Our Ref: COR/055/14

20 February 2014

Dear Cathie

At the meeting on 5 February 2014 the Committee for Employment and Learning agreed to forward the correspondence from the Committee for Finance and Personnel regarding its Inquiry into Flexible Working in the Public Sector in Northern Ireland to NICS Departments for comment.

The Committee has requested information on the extent to which flexible working practices are being applied, on any good practice cases, and on the number of employees who undertake all or part of their work from remote locations (i.e. away from the traditional office environment).

My Department fully supports work life balance and aims to offer flexibility to staff, taking into account business need. The Department has a large number (28.18%) of staff with alternative working patterns in place and has a larger proportion of both male and female staff working part-time in comparison to the wider NICS. The 2013 Equality Profile for DEL shows that 39.6% of female staff work part time in comparison to 30.7% in the rest of the NICS. A higher proportion of male staff (8.6%) also work part time in DEL in comparison to those in the rest of the NICS (5.6%).

Although there is no central Home/Remote Working Policy in operation across the NICS, Departments have discretion, on a case by case basis and subject to normal business considerations, to implement working from home on a temporary basis. DEL supports staff if they wish to work remotely in local offices on an ad hoc basis where there is capacity, to increase flexibility for those staff living in those locations. Due to the ad hoc nature of these arrangements, DEL does not formally record this information and I am therefore unable to provide the number of employees who avail of them.



In addition to accommodating alternative working patterns and remote/home working, DEL also aims to make best use of existing technologies to facilitate remote/flexible working and is keen to continue to exploit new technologies to further support more flexible working practices. There are a number of technological initiatives in place that staff can utilise to work more flexibly such as drop in zones, use of laptops, video conferencing and telephony.

As part of DEL's commitment to the new NICS smarter and more flexible ways of working under the Workplace NI and future@work initiatives, a drop in zone was created in Adelaide House. The zone, which has been equipped with three PCs, one docking station, and a printer, allows all NIGOV users to log in to their accounts.

Staff are currently able to request a laptop instead of a desktop PC and this can then be used in both the traditional office environment or remotely. DEL currently has 109 staff who can remotely access work using their laptop in this way. Video Conferencing is also available to staff to eliminate the need for unnecessary travel. DEL has 5 mobile video conferencing units and there are a number of static video conferencing units across the Northern Ireland Civil Service which may also be used by staff by appointment. It is also anticipated that desktop video conferencing will be rolled out to all DEL staff at Grade 7 level and above by May 2014. In terms of telephony, all DEL staff now use the Internet Protocol Telephony (IPT) system for voice telephony services. Using this system, staff can log into any phone anywhere in the network and use their own telephone extension. Some staff have also been provided with a mobile phone or Blackberry for use away from the office.

DEL is committed to supporting flexible working practices within the Department and will continue as a Department and in conjunction with the wider NICS to explore initiatives to further develop flexible working practices.

I trust the Committee find this helpful and I look forward to receiving the findings and recommendations from the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely



FIONA STANLEY
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer